

Author's Note

Reasons to hope are everywhere, but they're almost never obvious. I believe in God, but I also believe that this world is a cursed place. That's why I don't shy away from darker themes; I believe that reasons to hope are like flakes of gold at the bottom of a river: buried beneath dirt, contaminated water, and pieces of whatever riffraff has fallen into the stream, but real and valuable nonetheless.

Think of your life as a video game. (I haven't been a gamer in years, so forgive me if my jargon is a little rusty.) In this game, you have a handful of main objectives. You need to collect resources. You need to find the perfect playstyle for your unique character. You need to assist the characters you care about in physical, mental, and spiritual ways. There is a vocal minority of NPCs determined to convince you that you will never have high enough power levels to complete the next quest in the main storyline, and you need to prove them wrong. Along the way, you will need to gather a team for the battle royale stages.

You *will* use every ability and power-up at your disposal. If you allow yourself to completely lose hope, you will fail one or more of your core objectives because hope is one of your most powered-up tools. At each level, the Game Designer has given you just enough resources to pass. If you find yourself stuck in a tunnel so narrow that only one button on your controller

works, and your character can only squirm, that's *something* that you can do!

Keep playing, friend. Even if you're in a situation as confusing and terrifying as the town of Votsboro, keep playing.

By His grace,

Matthew M. Waters